

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11

TRSE-00 OMB-01 HA-05 IO-13 EUR-12 ARA-10 /105 W

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R 010830Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1445

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 2090

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PORG, OAU, GB

SUBJECT: OUTGOING OAU CHAIRMAN: HOW WELL DID HE DO?

1. ON JULY 18, GOG PRESIDENT BONGO TURNED OVER OAU CHAIRMANSHIP TO PRES. NIMEIRI OF SUDAN. THIS TELEGRAM IS INTENDED TO TRY AND BRIEFLY ASSESS HIS PERFORMANCE DURING YEAR OF HIS STEWARDSHIP AND TO SEE IF THERE ARE LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE.

2. FOR OAU ITSELF, IT WAS DIFFICULT YEAR, PERHAPS NO MORE SO THAN SOME, BUT DIFFICULT ALL THE SAME. PROBLEMS INHERITED BY BONGO, E.G. HORN, CHAD-LIBYA, WESTERN SAHARA, SOUTHERN AFRICAN, ARE STILL AROUND. THEY APPEAR BE NO WORSE THAN WHEN HE ASSUMED CHAIRMANSHIP, AND IN SOME CASES, E.G., NAMIBIA, THERE IS HOPE OF RESOLUTION. NEW PROBLEMS WERE ADDED -- SHABA, PAN-AFRICAN FORCE, AND NEW ASPECTS OF THE OLDER PROBLEMS EMERGED, PARTICULARLY IN HORN, ZIMBABWE AND CHAD. CUBANS BECAME AN EVEN GREATER BONE OF CONTENTION.

3. IN EVERY INSTANCE EXCEPT POSSIBLY IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN WHERE CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE BEEN SPECIAL, MUCH OF WORLD IN GENERAL AND USG IN PARTICULAR ALONG WITH WESTERN ALLIES, CONFIDENTIAL

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REPEATEDLY ATTEMPTED TO ASCERTAIN WHAT OAU COULD OR WOULD DO, WHICH IN TURN PUT PRESSURE ON BOTH BONGO AND SECGEN ETEKI AS THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR COMING UP WITH ANSWERS. IN OUR JUDGMENT, BONGO, MORE SO THAN HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR, TRIED TO DO WHAT HE COULD. OAU SYSTEM GIVES NEITHER CHAIRMAN NOR SECGEN LATITUDE NOR AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS ON AD HOC BASIS. UNLESS THERE IS MANDATE FROM ANNUAL

HEADS OF STATE MEETING OR FROM RARE AD HOC HEADS OF STATE MEETING, OR UNLESS THERE IS CLEAR LINE ENTRENCHED IN CHARTER ITSELF, FOR CHAIRMAN A/O SEC GEN TO TAKE ANY INITIATIVE EXPOSES HIM TO SLINGS AND ARROWS FROM ALL PARTS OF DIVIDED AFRICA. SAFEST COURSE FOR EITHER ONE IS THEREFORE TO REST ON KNOWN MANDATES AND DO NOTHING ON OTHER MATTERS.

4. BONGO WAS NOT WILLING TO DO THAT. WHILE IT WAS NOT ALWAYS CLEAR WHETHER HE SPOKE FOR GABON OR OAU OR BOTH (AND HE NO DOUBT INTENDED IT THAT WAY), HE SPOKE OUT BEFORE KHARTOUM IN FAVOR OF ALL PARTIES SETTLEMENT IN ZIMBABWE, HE PRAISED EFFORTS OF WESTERN FIVE IN NABIBIA, HE APPEALED TO ALL MEMBERS OF OAU TO COME TO HELP OF ZAIRE IN SHABA, AND HE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED CONCEPT OF FRANCOPHONE FORCE. HE ASKED FOR CLEMENCY FOR UGANDANS CONDEMNED TO PUBLIC EXECUTION BY IDI AMIN AND CHEERED ON SADAT PEACE INITIATIVE. HE WAS STILL SENDING CIRCULAR TELEGRAMS IN AN EFFORT TO RESOLVE WESTERN SAHARA ALMOST UP TO DAY HE TURNED OVER CHAIRMANSHIP. HE HAD LITTLE TO DO WITH GUINEA/SENEGAL/IVORY COAST RAPPROCHEMENT, BUT CLAIMED IT AS SUCCESS FOR OAU, ALL THE SAME. IN SHORT, SEEN FROM HERE, HE TOOK HIS JOB SERIOUSLY AND WAS WILLING TAKE SOME RISKS. HIS EFFECTIVENESS IS DIFFERENT MATTER. OAU PER SE HAD LITTLE OR NO IMPACT ON EVOLUTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN PROBLEMS. CONFIDENTIAL

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BONGO OCCASIONALLY DEPLORED THAT, BUT WAS WISE ENOUGH NOT TO PUSH IT. ON PROBLEMS SUCH AS HORN, WESTERN SAHARA AND CHAD-LIBYA, HE COULD AND DID FALL BACK ON MANDATES HE INHERITED AND SIMPLY DID WHAT HE COULD TO KEEP MEDIATION EFFORTS GOING, ADDING LITTLE PUSHED OF HIS OWN AS IN CHAD-LIBYA DISPUTE WHICH COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO HIM AS PRESIDENT OF GABON AND NOT OAU. IN CASE OF SHABA, HIS APPEAL WAS CITED BY MOROCCO AND IVORY COAST AS BASIS FOR DISPATCHING TROOPS. THEY MAY WELL HAVE DONE SO ANYWAY, BUT THE APPEAL MADE IT EASIER, AND WHILE BONGO HAD NO REAL AUTHORITY TO ISSUE IT, HE HAS FOR MOST PART ESCAPED CRITICISM FOR MAKING IT EVEN FROM PROGRESSIVE (AS OPPOSED TO HIS IMPLIED SUPPORT FOR PAN-AFRICAN FORCE).

5. THAT OAU FOR MOST PART WAS LARGELY INEFFECTUAL IN RESOLVING AFRICAN PROBLEMS NONETHELESS DOES NOT SEEM TO US TO BE REFLECTION ON BONGO. GIVEN AFRICA'S DIVIDED HOUSE, IT IS SOMETIMES RATHER REMARKABLE THAT OAU CAN FUNCTION AT ALL, AND INDEED, IN OUR JUDGMENT, OAU PERFORMANCE WILL ONLY IMPROVE WHEN OAU STRENGTHENS ITS OWN CHARTER, WHEN AFRICA'S DIVISIONS SUBSIDE, AND WHEN OUTSIDE TROUBLE-MAKERS DESIST FROM INVOLVING THEMSELVES IN

AFRICA. NONETHELESS, WHILE WE THINK IT UNREALISTIC IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES TO EXPECT OAU PRESIDENTS TO BE LEADERS, GIVEN OAU'S STRUCTURAL DEFICIENCIES, BONGO MAY HAVE, BY HIS WILLINGNESS TO TAKE SOME ACTIONS, OR AT LEAST SPEAK OUT, SET ONE OR TWO PRECEDENTS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL LATER ON, AND IT WILL PAY US, WE BELIEVE, TO KEEP ON CONSULTING HIM ON AFRICAN MATTERS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1446  
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AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 2090

6. BONGO DID HAVE CERTAIN ADVANTAGES THAT HIS SUCCESSOR MAY NOT HAVE, HOWEVER, AND WE MAY FIND ACCORDINGLY, THAT NIMEIRI WILL NOT FEEL HIMSELF QUITE AS FREE AS BONGO DID TO TRY AND EXERCISE A LEADERSHIP ROLE. THUS, GABON HAD NO QUARRELS WITH ANY OF ITS NEIGHBORS TO INHIBIT BONGO, GABON HARBORED NO LIBERATION GROUP OF CONSEQUENCE (THERE ARE SAO TOME AND EQUATORIAL GUINEAN REFUGEES IN GABON, BUT THEY ARE NON-MILITANTS AND HARDLY REAL PROBLEMS FOR BONGO), GABON AS A SMALL COUNTRY OFFERED NO THREAT TO ANYONE (NOT EVEN SAO TOME), GABON WAS BASICALLY UNINFLUENCED BY AFRO-ARAB PROBLEMS OR ARAB PRESSURES, AND FINALLY, GABON ENJOYED ITS OWN INTERNAL POLITICAL STABILITY. TRUE, BONGO WAS VULNERABLE TO CHARGES OF FRENCH INFLUENCE, BUT AS A SON OF AFRICA WHO WAS NOT EDUCATED IN FRANCE, SOMEWHAT LESS SO THAN CERTAIN OTHER FRANCOPHONE LEADERS. HIS PERSONAL INFLUENCE OUTSIDE OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA AND CERTAINLY AMONG PROGRESSIVES WAS NOT GREAT, ALTHOUGH WE ARE PERSUADED THAT YHOMBY-OPANGO IN BRAZZAVILLE FOR ONE DOES LISTEN TO HIM. IN THIS REGARD, OF COURSE, HE IS NOT ALONE. THE VOICES NYERERE AND OBASANJO OFTEN ARE LOST IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA.

7. ON BALANCE, AND IN SUMMARY, WE THINK, GIVEN THE  
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POLITICAL COMPLEXITIES OF AFRICA AND THE LIMITATIONS OF  
THE OAU CHARTER, THAT BONGO PROBABLY EXCEEDED WHAT COULD  
HAVE REASONABLY BEEN EXPECTED OF HIM, AND WE ARE NOT  
SURE THAT WE WILL SEE COMPARABLE PERFORMANCES SOON AGAIN.  
FROM OUR OWN POINT OF VIEW, BONGO WAS REPEATEDLY HELPFUL,  
BOTH ON MATTERS OF DIRECT CONCERN TO US SUCH AS JOURNALISTS  
IN BANGUI AND THE CUBAN/SOVIET PRESENCE, AND ON THE  
BROADER ISSUES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA. EVEN WITH THE PROSPECT  
OF MODERATE CHAIMEN OVER NEXT TWO OR THREE YEARS, WE  
MAY HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE WHETHER WE SHALL BE ABLE OBTAIN  
THAT KIND OF SUPPORT FROM AN OAU CHAIRMAN AGAIN. BUT  
WHETHER OR NOT NIMEIRI FEELS HE HAS SAME FREEDOM TO ACT  
AS BONGO DID, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT USG SHOULD CON-  
TINUE TO CONSULT WITH, AND WHENEVER DESIRABLE BRIEF, OAU  
PRESIDENT SON MATTERS OF MUTUAL CONCERN IN AFRICA. EVEN  
IF THE RESULTS MAY NOT BE VERY SATISFYING FROM OUR POINT  
OF VIEW, THE ACT OF CONSULTATION IS OF IMPORTANCE IN  
AND OF ITSELF, DEMONSTRATING, AS IT DOES, USG WILLINGNESS  
TO SHARE OUR VIEWS IN CANDOR WITH AFRICAN LEADERS, AND  
HERE AND THERE, AS WAS CASE WITH BONGO, WE MAY INCREAS-  
INGLY FIND NOT ONLY SYMPATHETIC HEARING, BUT ALSO A  
WILLINGNESS TO DO OR SAY SOMETHING HELPFUL. IF BONGO  
WAS ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT OAU PRESIDENTS NEED NOT  
BE MUTE, THIS MAY HAVE BEEN MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION  
OF HIS PRESIDENCY. ON MORE PERSONAL PLANE, WE WOULD  
EXPECT THAT BOTH NIMEIRI AND TOLBERT WILL FIND IN BONGO  
MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A WILLING SUPPORTER WHO MAY BE  
USEFUL TO THEM.

8. DEPT PASS OAU COLLECTIVE IF DESIRED. TIENKEN

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## Message Attributes

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